

INVESTIGATING THE LEARNING OF ACADEMIC VOCABULARY IN INTENSIVE COURSES OF ENGLISH USING MULTIPLE

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Abstract

The words contained in the academic word list (AWL) are nowadays seen as essential for EFL learners wishing to study at English speaking universities, particularly when taken together with the most commonly occurring 2000 English words (Nation 2006). However, current practice in many pre-sessional Academic English courses does not fully support the explicit teaching of the AWL within the curriculum, though research suggests that direct teaching leads to higher target word pickup rates than implicit teaching (Sonbul and Schmitt 2009). One of the reasons behind this is that some tutors believe that advanced learners are capable to learn vocabulary from the academic exposure, and that many learners show higher levels of mastery of the AWL (Alothman 2013). Unfortunately, from personal experience, some practitioners depend on a single measure to estimate the knowledge of the AWL for logistic and practicality reasons. This might be considered unwise due to the incremental process of vocabulary knowledge. The study reported here aimed to investigate student learning of academic vocabulary in typical pre-sessional courses in the in the UK, and to discuss the benefits and challenges for applying multiple measures to assess the vocabulary gains.

A total of 102 students studying on two UK pre-sessional programmes participated in the study. Unlike much previous work, this study used multiple measures to assess three levels of vocabulary knowledge: meaning recognition, written form recall and recall of different forms of the AWL (derivatives). In addition to pre and post testing of learner vocabulary, both learners and tutors were surveyed in order to investigate which learning/teaching method they think contributes to high pickup rates, and report their beliefs regarding the AWL learning needs. In the study I will present the results of the analyses of the data undertaken which show interesting variations in vocabulary knowledge across the tests. Also, I will discuss the practicality to use multiple tests in real classroom situations, based on the population and context explored in the study. The implications of these findings for teaching, learning and assessment in an academic context will be presented and discussed.

BIO DATA

I am a PhD student at the University of Roehampton, Centre for Language Assessment Research (CLARe). I am interested in vocabulary; learning and assessment, and focusing on the interface of explicit and implicit vocabulary knowledge, as well as the depth and breadth assessment of vocabulary knowledge.

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